



Quality Watch

By Gary Trimmer

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Michigan's Stray Voltage Rules Finalized

Michigan's rules to detect on-farm stray voltage are finally finished. The development of these administrative rules, entitled "Rules and Regulations Governing Animal Contact Current Mitigation" took nearly six years to complete. The process to develop the stray voltage rules began in 2001 when a group of agriculture industry leaders came together to create a uniform procedure and process to deal with on-farm stray voltage problems in Michigan. The group's goals were addressed in the final rules. The goals were to:

- Develop a uniform procedure to detect stray voltage originating both on and off the farm.
- Require the power utility company to investigate all stray voltage complaints in a uniform manner.
- Develop a process that would allow for an expert third party panel to review, evaluate, and make recommendations to resolve stray voltage complaints.
- Reduce extremely costly litigation for producers.

The development of the rules began when an industry task force group, which included representatives from Michigan Milk Producers Association, Dairy Farmers of America, Michigan Farm Bureau and Michigan State University, met in early 2004 to rewrite the rules. The Agriculture Engineering Department at Michigan State University provided technical expertise. After much collaboration and discussion, the task force submitted their proposed rules to the Michigan

Public Service Commission (MPSC) in mid 2004. The MPSC completed their review and revisions in mid 2005 and scheduled a series of public hearings in December 2005. After receiving both oral testimony and written comments, the rules were again revised and submitted to the Legislative Service Bureau and State Office of Administrative Hearings and Rules for approval. In August 2006, the proposed rules were forwarded to the Joint Committee on Administrative Rules for final approval, which occurred in February 2007. The entire process has taken nearly six years.

Following is a review of the rules process:

1. If a producer requests an investigation by the utility company, the utility company must respond and conduct an investigation to determine stray voltage levels. Note: This process happens frequently and most stray voltage issues are resolved at this step.

2. If the stray voltage issue is not resolved, the producer may request the utility company to conduct a formal investigation to determine the level of stray voltage on the farm and where it is most likely to occur with the cows. The area could be the milking parlor, barn, etc. The rules call for a standard procedure to be followed to specifically determine the stray voltage. In addition, the utility company must determine the amount of stray voltage coming from the utility company, and from the farm. The rules set forth specific testing protocol to be used. If it is determined that

the animal contact current exceeds two milliamperes and if the utility company contribution exceeds one milliampere then the utility company must take action within two days to reduce the utilities contribution to one milliampere or less.

3. If, after completion of this step, the issue is still not resolved, the utility company or producer may request the MPSC to appoint a panel of three to five experts to investigate the stray voltage problem and report their conclusions to the Public Service Commission, utility company and the producer. The rules call for specific levels of expertise to be considered by the commission when appointing third party experts and a time frame to complete their report.

4. If, after the expert panel's report is complete, there is still no resolution, then the producer may file a formal complaint to request a contested case hearing before the MPSC to resolve the dispute. The commission will review all facts presented by the utility company and producer to make their decision.

Continued on page 8

The new stray voltage rules give dairy producers a means to address concerns that utility companies must comply with.



News & Views

The latest dairy news

January Class III Price Up 9 Cents

The January Class III price is \$13.56, up 9 cents from December, and up 17 cents from a year ago. The January Class IV price was \$12.53, up 23 cents from last month and up 33 cents from a year ago.

Quality Watch Continued from page 6

If the decision is in favor of the producer, the utility company must make the necessary modifications or corrections to resolve the issue. If the decision is in favor of the utility company, the utility company is not required to take any further action.

At any point in the process the producer may pursue litigation. The rules do not prevent this from happening. However, one of the reasons for the development of the rules was to identify and resolve stray voltage problems before there is a need to litigate.

For several years MMPA has supported a resolution calling for uniform, fair and equitable resolution to stray voltage issues. We believe the new rules are fair and provide the necessary tools for both utility companies and farmers to solve a stray voltage problem. Copies of the rules are available at the Michigan Public Service Commission or on their Web site at www.michigan.gov/mpsc.

Identify Opportunities and Overcome Challenges for Future Energy Needs at Michigan Agri-Energy Conference

Renewable energy sources such as biomass, wind, and solar are generating a great deal of interest in the United States. Michigan's Agri-Energy Conference 2007 held March 13-14 at the Holiday Inn South, 6820 S. Cedar Street in Lansing, will highlight renewable energy while identifying market barriers, the economics of renewable energy, and examining case studies and success stories.

Kicking off this year's event is a keynote address from the United States Department of Energy followed by breakout sessions hosted by technical experts in the fields of renewable energy, energy efficiency, and environmental regulations.

An exhibit area will feature the latest products and services in the renewable energy arena, as well as informational booths on current research and development from various universities and institutes.

Participants will also have the opportunity to attend a grant-writing workshop and learn the tips for securing Farm Bill, Section 9006 grant dollars.

To learn more or register for the two-day conference, contact the Environmental Assistance Center at 1-800-662-9278 or register on-line at: www.michigan.gov/deqworkshops.

Upcoming Events

March

- MMPA Milker Training Schools (*see page 19 for complete listing*)
- 2-10 Agriculture and Natural Resources Week at MSU
– East Lansing
- 14 Michigan Agri-Energy Conference – Lansing
- 19 MMPA Resolutions Committee Meeting – Lansing
- 20 MMPA State Annual Meeting – Lansing
- 21 Ag Day at the Capitol – Lansing
- 30 Young Cooperator Dairy Leadership Conference
– Mt. Pleasant

April

- 5 MMPA Advisory Committee Meeting – Novi
- 18 MMPA Dairy Communicator Meeting – Lansing